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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [SR](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH NEW DEFMIN

Classified by Ambassador Michael Polt, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (c) Summary: The Ambassador's June 1 courtesy call on new DEFMIN Dragan Sutanovac focused on ICTY cooperation (improving), Kosovo (the military remains committed to staying out), and developing Serbia's security relationship with the U.S. and NATO. Sutanovac has already experienced the frustration of his ministry's anorexic budgetary situation, and like his predecessors is hard at work looking for creative ways to get more of the budget funneled into MoD coffers. The new minister will be a pragmatic supporter of much of our agenda, but his bottom line is still a considerable amount of self-promotion. End summary.

ICTY

¶2. (c) Sutanovac shared the Ambassador's analysis that the arrest of Zdravko Tolimir was a positive development in the short term. He claimed the military was not in any way involved in the operation, and had few details to provide regarding the operation. He noted that Tolimir's arrest was a badly needed step forward, adding that his arrest outside of Serbia might help the GoS convince ICTY and the international community that the remaining PIFWCs are not on its territory. Sutanovac said he would be ramping up the Ministry's own commitment to ICTY cooperation through aggressive "no notice" sweeps of military installations to ensure no PIFWCs were receiving support from anyone in the armed forces.

KOSOVO

¶3. (c) Sutanovac reiterated that the Serbian military had no plans or interest to intervene in Kosovo under any possible scenario. He noted that the military stood ready to provide medical care and other humanitarian assistance as needed in the event of violence or a humanitarian emergency in the province. He warned, though, that the international community should keep a watchful eye on Interior Ministry personnel, especially those now in Kosovo. Admitting his long abiding interest in MININT issues, he said there are many in the police forces whose careers have been shaped by past experience in Kosovo, and admitted some may be looking for an excuse to stir up trouble - he stated there are some 200 active duty police with connections to past Kosovo violence who would bear watching.

SECURITY RELATIONSHIPS, CHALLENGES

¶4. (c) Sutanovac told the Ambassador he considered it his mission "to prepare the Serbian armed forces for inclusion in NATO," and committed to continuing to work with the U.S. bilaterally to develop our security relationship. He said Serbia's PfP Presentation Document would be delivered to Brussels by the end of June, and expressed confidence that the Security Document, though currently held up by bureaucratic inertia, should follow shortly thereafter. Sutanovac reiterated strong support for the DRG process, promised to seek a recommendation from CHOD Ponos for additional MANPADS destructions by the end of July, and pledged continued support for an ambitious training and exchange relationship.

¶5. (c) At the same time, he bemoaned the fact that the military's transformation was being severely curtailed by budgetary woes. He

said salary and pension payments were devouring the bulk of his budget, and complained that the MoD was not seeing any rewards from downsizing and privatization of military properties (he mentioned specifically the New Embassy Compound site) as the Finance Ministry was allocating the money he generated elsewhere. Sutanovac mentioned several schemes the MoD was brainstorming to generate capital outside the budget process (including in-kind payments for properties and running civilian flights out of military airfields), but admitted these ideas were unlikely to go far.

COMMENT

16. (c) We have dealt with Sutanovac for a long time as a DS Vice President, and know him to be a competent, pragmatic politician with a real interest in security issues (though almost exclusively on the MININT side) and a willingness to stand up to political opponents in DSS and G-17 on issues about which he feels strongly. At the same time, though, Sutanovac is by his own admission looking out first for himself - he told the Ambassador just prior to accepting the Ministerial position that he conditioned his acceptance on a guarantee from President Tadic that DS would lend its full support to running Sutanovac as its candidate for Mayor of Belgrade at the next elections (probably by the end of 2007). Sutanovac told us up front that he sees MoD as a temporary job, and that Belgrade mayor puts him in a better long-term position politically. In the meantime, we expect he will continue the pace and scope of military transformation undertaken by his predecessors and will be a genuine supporter of moving Serbia closer to the US and NATO.

POLT